



Juho Heikkinen

V I D I G A L

– an autoethnography

Master's Thesis
Aalto University
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*What are the cruxes of photographic
storytelling in cross-cultural visual
communication?*

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Acknowledgements

Traveling and experiencing different cultures have played a crucial part of shaping my identity and expanding my world view. During the three years that it took me to finish my Master's studies in Aalto University I have been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to keep exploring the world, this time with a new academic viewpoint. The scale of experiences and emotions have been large; during the process I learned to understand my own cultural identity and background a bit better, had new experiences, managed to make new close friends, but also had to let some of the close ones go.

The journey of writing this thesis took a long route and it would not been possible without the help, support and advices I got. I want to thank Arja Karhumaa and Hanna Weselius for your help and guidance during my writing process; Saku Heinänen and Zach Dodson for their inspiring lectures; Aalto University for the financial support and the opportunity to understand the world a bit better; Photobooks from Finland for including my book to your collection, NGO Ser, Fabí and all the friends in Rio De Janeiro for letting me in to your life for a brief moment; CDP for the years in Aalto, Marcel for helping me to transform my thoughts into sentences, Andre for the valuable comments and tips on the way and all of my friends who after all these years are still by my side. Last but not least I want to thank Ditte and my family for the endless love and support.

Abstract

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Cross-cultural communication is something that many of us use on a daily basis. In order to understand the world and its people, in an ever growing multicultural environment, we must understand other cultural contexts outside of our own. In this thesis I will examine two approaches that have helped me grasp the complexities of communication.

My first approach is autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method, in which a researcher uses personal experiences and self-reflection to understand wider cultural and social concepts. In this thesis I am introducing this method as a useful tool to inspect one's own, and other cultural context. It also works as a communication tool for artists, writers, videographers and many others in creative fields. I am researching its possibilities in the form of a thematic photo essay, which was shot during my stay in Rio De Janeiro in 2017.

The Second approach I utilize is Stage Theory, e Bennett scale, created by sociologist Milton J. Bennett. e Bennett scale describes the different ways in which people might react to cultural differences. I introduce Bennett's definition of culture(s) and the different stages through examples. I will use autoethnography to relate my experiences to the Bennett scale.

The product of the thesis is a photo essay and exhibition, where I use the personal, reflective approach to create a thematic photo essay. The story takes place in the pacified favela of Vidigal in Rio De Janeiro. My goal is to visually communicate my experiences in this new cultural context and compare it to my existing cultural frame of reference. With this research I hope to gain knowledge about cross-cultural communication and explore new ways to communicate effectively using photo essays as a tool.

Keywords: Storytelling, photo essay, autoethnography, favela

Abstrakti

Tekijä: Juho Heikkinen
Työn nimi: Vidigal – an autoethnography
Koulutusohjelma: Visuaalisen viestinnän muotoilu
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Elämme aikakaudella, jossa kulttuurienvälinen viestintä on arkipäivää. Jotta pystyisimme ymmärtämään maailmaa ja kommunikoimaan yhä monimutkaisemmassa ja monikulttuurissa ympäristössä, meidän on kyettävä ymmärtämään muitakin kulttuureja kuin vain omaamme.

Esitän Pro gradu -tutkielmassani kaksi lähestymistapaa aiheeseen. Ensimmäinen lähestymistapani on autoethnografia. Autoethnografia on kvalitatiivinen tutkimusmenetelmä, jossa tutkija käyttää henkilökohtaisia kokemuksia ja itsereflektiota hahmottamaan kulttuurisia ja sosiaalisia käsitteitä. Työssäni pyrin esittämään tämän menetelmän käyttökelpoiseksi työkaluksi eri kulttuurikontekstien tarkasteluun. Tutkin autoethnografian rajoja ja sen kuvallista käyttöä valokuvaproduktiossani, jonka olen kuvannut asuessani Rio de Janeirossa vuonna 2017.

Toinen lähestymistapani on sosiologi Milton J. Bennettin laatima *Bennett scale*. Se kuvaa erilaisia tapoja, joilla ihmiset usein reagoivat kohdatessaan kulttuurieroja. Esittelen Bennettin kulttuurin määritelmän ja teorian eri vaiheet esimerkkien avulla. Käytän autoethnografiaa apuna vertaamalla omia kokemuksiani Bennettin teoriaan.

Pro gradu -tutkielmani produktio-osa on temaattinen valokuvaessee ja näyttely, jossa käytän henkilökohtaista, pohdiskelevaa lähestymistapaa joka sijoittuu Rio de Janeiron Vidigal-favelaan. Pyrkimykseni produktio-osassa on kommunikoida valokuvien kokemuksistani uudessa kulttuurissa ja tuoda se takaisin omaan kulttuuriseen ympäristööni visuaalisessa muodossa. Tämän tutkimuksen avulla yritän oppia uutta kulttuurien välisestä visuaalisesti viestinnästä ja uusista tavoista kommunikoida tehokkaasti valokuvaesseen muodossa.

Avainsanat: tarinankerronta, valokuvaessee, autoethnografia, favela

1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives and main research question

We live in the era of cross-cultural communication, and it has become faster, easier and cheaper than ever. In order to be able to understand the world and its people in this complex and multicultural environment, we must understand other cultural contexts than just our own. Successful cross-cultural communication is based on human interaction, empathy, respect and understanding the cultural contexts. In order to achieve this type of knowledge, people have to truly learn the culture and its visual standards.

The aim of my thesis is to understand the concepts of cultural contexts better and explore the possible cruces one might encounter in cross-cultural visual communication. The goal of my production part is to create a personal, yet relatable visual story in a form of thematic photo essay.

My main research question is; *What are the cruces of photographic storytelling in cross-cultural visual communication?*

1.2 Research method and thesis type

My research method is autoethnography. It focuses on personal thoughts, feelings, stories, and observations as a way of understanding the social context where the research is done. It resonates naturally to my thesis and my working methods. It gives a tool to inspect my own working methods and processes. With the scope given by the autoethnographic method, I am able to combine my research on favelas, the personal impact of a new cultural environment and finally turn it into a visual story with the medium I am working (photography) using storytelling techniques for carrying out the end result.

My thesis type is an artistic research. I chose this approach because it resonated with the production part and it has a long tradition in Master's thesis in art and design field. In their book *Thesis Design. Research Meets Practice in Art and Design Master's Theses*. Maria Seliger and Young-ae Hahn writes divides the artistic research into three parts;

1. Study goal

The first part, Study goal, is “Understanding of the world in an interpretive or participatory sense, not seeking for an objective explanation.

2. Resulting knowledge

The second part, Resulting knowledge, is “non-conceptual knowledge and an existential truth of an audience and their surrounding world”.

3. Example

The third part, Example, is “An art performance on contemporary issues such as gender or environment, and documentation of the process” (Seliger and Hahn, 2015). In the production part of my thesis I use photography as an artistic medium to create a body of work, which consists of an exhibition and a photobook.

Seliger and Hahn describes the characteristic feature of the artistic research; “Instead of systematic methodology, artistic research is more about discovery” (Seliger and Hahn, 2015). I think that this part resonates well with my production part of my thesis. My main research method, autoethnography, helped me to deepen my understanding of the subject through experiences, but the artistic production is an ongoing process, that relies on experimenting and discovering. This is the reason why the nonlinear storytelling fits well to my production.

1.3 Autoethnography as a research method

Autoethnography as research method is a type of self-reflective storytelling that connects the researcher's personal experience to wider cultural and social contexts. This method is used in various disciplines including arts, design, psychology and education. (self.gutenberg.org, 2018.)

According to Ellingson and Ellis there are two types of autoethnography; *analytic autoethnography* and *evocative autoethnography*. Analytic autoethnographers focus on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena, when evocative autoethnographers focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and provoke emotional responses. (Ellingson and Ellis, 2008.)

In contrast to traditional social scientists, autoethnographers acknowledge the countless ways subjective experience affects the research process. For example, a researcher defines the preconditions of the research, which are dictated by institution, resources and personal motifs. Therefore, autoethnography as a method recognize the importance of the subject, emotion, and the researcher's influence, instead of trying to hide or deny these factors. In addition, autoethnographers acknowledge the fact that people with different backgrounds sees the world differently—and that traditional research methods can be limiting and exclusive. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010.)

Ellis, Adams and Bochner argues, that many times the problem with traditional and canonized forms of conducting research are from a homogenous viewpoint. Autoethnography tries to give voice and empower people with different premises, like race, gender, class or religion. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010.)

Researchers who uses autoethnography are communicating about realizations they have from cultural experiences either from outside or inside a certain cultural context. In order to a research to be an autoethnography and not only a personal story, autoethnographers have to analyze their experiences. Researchers have to use a set of theoretical and methodological tools and a research literature. If the researcher fails to link the autoethnography to an academical context, the methodological requirements are not met. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010.)

In addition, autoethnographers have to use their research skills to evaluate ways others may experience similar cultural realizations; researchers are required to use personal experience to make visible aspects of cultural experience for insiders and outsiders. Ellis, Adams and Bochner suggests, that to achieve this, autoethnographers might have to compare and contrast subjective experience to existing research and theory and, for example, interview members of the particular culture. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010.)

Autoethnography is often used in writing, but it is also commonly used technique in movies and other types of productions as an alternative to documentary and dramatic storytelling method. In autoethnography the research subject is the storyteller herself. With this subjective approach the researchers reflects their life experiences, ideas, viewpoints and beliefs, and because of that, it is sometimes considered to be biased and one sided. However, what separates autoethnography from more traditional research methods, is that it does not claim to be objective, but a personal interpretation of the subject. It is used to deepen and empathize the subject of the research. The knowledge obtained through this method is often combined to other research method in order to connect it to the context that is being researched.

Anniina Suominen writes in her Doctoral dissertation, that "Arts-based research and autoethnography are based on the artistic methods of representing partial, contextual and multi-layered reality in political and social contexts of representation. Similar to photographs, arts-based research creates 'visual' worlds evoking empathy and offers alternative ways of seeing reality and viewing one's life." (Suominen, 2003, p.21.)

The social context of representation is present in the production part of my thesis. I have intentionally tried to avoid stereotypical representations of favelas. Nevertheless, some of the photos I chose for my project raised discussion in the exhibition I held in Finland. One of them was the cover photo of the book. The photo was considered to be problematic by some visitors who visited the exhibition in Galleria Kallio in Helsinki.

The discussion I had was about the representation of the man in the photo; he is black, without a shirt and he is wearing sunglasses that

covers his eyes. He is facing seriously directly to the camera, tilting his head. Some of the people I talk perceived this image problematic, but they did not seem to be able to pinpoint why exactly. This illustrates the complexity of the subject. What is not visible in the picture, is that after we had a friendly conversation, he, being a photographer himself, was the one who conducted the photo in the end. On the other hand, I am aware of the complexity and problems of representation. As Williams argues, the visitors of a favela might have an underlying motif, and the subject is either romanticized or demonized. This is the risk artists and documentarists have to take – and be conscious of their motifs. Again, in this type of work, autoethnography is more transparent and honest method to approach the subject.

After the conversations I had, I came to the conclusion that bringing the photo from one cultural context to another, it is inevitable that the way people are interpreting the images are changing. To be able to identify and comprehend the possible connotations the photos (or words) can contain, it is important to keep in mind, that the interpretations are very cultural (and person) related. Taking into account that in the favelas of Rio De Janeiro approximately 67% of the population are black, the photo in question is perceived very differently in the surrounding it was taken. Nevertheless the color of the skin is far from neutral in Brazil; on the contrary to the percentage of the black people living in favelas, in the wealthy South zone of Rio the population is 90% white. (catcomm.org, 2015). The power relation in a photo is strongly defined by the context where and by who it is presented.

1.4 About the project

The place where I stayed during my Master's exchange in University PUC-Rio in Rio De Janeiro in Spring 2017, is a pacified favela called Vidigal. It is located in the wealthier, southern part of Rio De Janeiro's, next to a reputable neighborhood called Leblon. Vidigal is considered to be one of the tourist-friendly favelas, where one can find hostels, nightclubs and restaurants. (catcomm.org, 2015.) After living in Vidigal for some time, I decided to start a photography project about my new surround-

ing and the people living there. My background as a photographer and studies in Sociology fueled my curiosity and gave me tools to approach my subject. Even though favelas exist in almost every city in Brazil, the favelas in Rio are the most famous. Because the topography of Rio, the favelas are often located next to a reputable neighborhood, like Vidigal, and they are very visible for people living and visiting the city.

I chose photography to be main medium, because I felt that it would push me to approach people on the street and possibly give me an access to places that I could not enter otherwise. My new home was a hostel, which is part of an NGO, a non-profit organization, and is located in a cultural hot spot that held ballet classes, English courses and other activities. It also had a library and it hosted football matches and other sports for people living in Vidigal. Over the course of my stay, I got to know the founders and staff of the hostel, and eventually we became friends. This helped me a lot to understand more about the practises of the community. I was lucky to be invited to workshops and gatherings, where I was able to talk with the participants and take some photos for my thesis project. I interviewed the founders of the NGO, Elma and Alleluja and a young mother Layla, who lived in the hostel at the same time I did. With these interviews, conversations and shared experiences I started to feel more comfortable in Vidigal and I felt that my project is accepted by my closest people there.

One of my biggest challenges on conducting the research and creating a narrative was to define the goal of my project and what would my approach to the subject be. Before starting my project I felt it was necessary to research information about favelas as much as I could. An everyday crux that I kept encountering during my stay in Rio De Janeiro had to do with communication and cultural differences. For example, my knowledge and understanding of design, that I have gained through work and studies, or my ability to express myself in English or Finnish with witty nuances didn't help me to buy a cup of coffee in Portuguese or help me to navigate through the bus system of Rio De Janeiro. I felt stupid, irritated and helpless. I realized that in this context my lingual or academical skill set that I held in high value, became useless, and I felt lost.

The concrete realization that the value of one's knowledge and expertise is relative and depends on the context was very important to me. It was the starting point of my explorations in the world of Sociology and that was what inspired me to research more about this subject. I turned my focus on what I was most interested; the new culture around me. From my frustration rouse the urge to understand my new surrounding and comprehend the habits and practices better. I then turned my focus back on myself and my own cultural background and identity. In other words, I tried to become interculturally competent.

The works of art and stories that continues from generation to generation, are telling something essential about the human nature. Even though the settings and protagonists are changing, the best stories stays alive. This type of storytelling naturally leans on the audience's previous knowledge and ability to see through the surface. In my production, the favela is a scene for the personal story to take place. Because the starting point of my thesis is very personal and I chose my storytelling method to be nonlinear, it leaves me more space to approach my topic freely from subjective point of view. The production part of my thesis is not meant to be read as an documentary. The photo book travels through time back and forth, from before and after my stay in Vidigal, from portraits to subtle allusions, which I hope will give rhythm and depth to the work.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE FAVELAS

2.1 What are favelas?

“The term favela...is difficult to define, in part because favelas have changed so dramatically over the past thirty-five years. About the only things that today's Vidigal has in common with the same neighborhood in 1978 is the absence of property title and the continuing discrimination against its residents, yet everyone still recognizes it as a favela.” (rioonwatch.org, 2018)

The term ‘Favela’ refers to a low-income community that is located within or on the outskirts of Brazil’s large cities. The origins of the favela in the Brazilian communities formed by former slaves dates back to the late 19th century, but it was the wave of migration from the non-urban areas to the cities from the 1940s to the 1970s that was main cause of the growth of the favelas in Brazil. The poor rural migrants faced with excessive costs for sparse land and housing, had little choice but to occupy whatever free land they could find. From 1950 to 1980 the number of people living in favelas in Rio de Janeiro alone increased from about 170 000 to more than 600 000, and by the early 21st century it was estimated that there were as many as 1 000 favelas there. (catcomm.org, 2015)

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 6 percent of Brazil’s total population lives in favelas and approximately 1.5 million people, approximately 24% of the population of Rio de Janeiro, live in favelas. Today the favelas range from slum-like conditions to highly-functioning, vibrant neighborhoods. Rio has more favela residents than any other Brazilian city and, all together, Rio’s favelas would add up to be the ninth largest city in the country. On 2013, 32% of people living in favelas were in the lower class and 65% in the middle class. (catcomm.org, 2015)

2.2 The term Favela

The aerial photos of favelas have become inseparable stereotypical image of Brazil with Carnival, football and beaches. The favelas of Rio are one of the most media-covered low-income communities in the world. According to an NGO CatComm, the communities are often misrepresented by misleading or discriminating choices of words that are used to depict

them in media. There does not seem to be a consensus for correct term for favelas, and the terms used in media varies. In English speaking media favela is often translated to slum, shanty town, squatter settlement or ghetto, but according to CatComm, a Rio de Janeiro based NGO, each of these terms are misleading. They either have negative or false connotations or they are neglecting the diversity of the communities.

M.Alejandra Revelo-Imery writes in her article *Translating ‘Favela’ Part 1: The Problem of Translation*, that the favela is the most perceptive term and the connotations are too complicated to be translated. The problem is, that stigma of reinforced stereotype as slums and dark places has serious consequences and affects people’s confidence, self-esteem and life opportunities. According to Revelo-Imery, the diversity of Rio’s favelas should be recognized and named accordingly. (Revelo-Imery, M, 2014)

Claire Williams talks about the same issues when translating the word, but she favors the “morro”, a hill, instead of favela. She argues in her article *Ghettotourism and Voyeurism, or Challenging Stereotypes and Raising Consciousness? Literary and Non-literary Forays into the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro*, that the historical term favela is too generic and degrading for people living in them. Williams argues, that instead of favela, more neutral term would be morro (hill), because many of communities are built on steep hills, or bairro (neighbourhood), or comunidade (community). Williams argues that the term favela used in commercial purposes, it has become “a tropical prefix used to spice up western places and products” It is used in guidebooks in tourism, but it is strongly associated with poverty, crime and violence. (Williams, 2008.)

Williams writes, that often the tourists have a superficial conception that after visiting a favela, they are enlightened and well informed about the problems in Brazil, and that they are now in the know about “an exotic, dangerous, primitive location that does not exist in the developed world”. (Williams, 2008) She continues; “Usually he/she plays the role of the anthropological observer and very often there is an underlying motif of superiority (racial, sexual, class or imperial) and a projection of ‘fears and fantasies of the ethnicised cultural “other”’. (Williams, 2008.)

Williams' perception seems to be that by default the tourist gaze is saturated by the feeling of superiority of it is very often voyeuristic by its nature. I disagree. I believe in more humane approach, that educated and self-reflecting people are aware of their own background and are able to explore the world without the need of underpin their own way of life.

2.3 The interviews

As In order to get more insight about the life in Vidigal, I conducted two interviews as a background information. In the questionnaire I asked the following questions:

1. When were you born?
2. Can you tell me a bit about your life?
3. Can you tell me a bit about your studies and work.
4. How long have you been living in Vidigal?
5. Has life changed in Vidigal a lot after the pacification?
6. How different is Vidigal from other communities?
7. Can you tell me a bit about the Ngo SER, the history, goals, work, about the hostels, etc.
8. I there anything you want share with people to know about you, about Vidigal or about SER?

First two answers are from the founders of the NGO, Elma and Antônio de Aleluia and second one is Layla da Cunha Horta. These interviews gave me insight and helped me to reflect my own observations and the everyday life in Vidigal. Hearing Elma's, Antônio's and Layla stories was an important factor for my own working. I used them to reflect to my desk research, and they opened up a new paths to approach the subject.

With the interviews and conversations I had, I learned about the lifes, hopes and fears that Elma, Antônio and Layla had. I learned concretely about the complexity of favelas and that even Layla, born in Rio, felt like a foreigner when she first moved to Vidigal. The interviews are, in a way, the link between my subjective experiences and the desk research. I was able to share some of the experiences, but I also felt in a concrete way the difference of our backgrounds and the way culture shapes our perception.

Elma de Aleluia & Antônio de Aleluia

Elma's story:

I was born and raised in Niteroi in 1953, a city in the state of Rio. I came from a simple family, but with strong values and that made my education their priority. I've graduated in Economics in 1981, but before that, in 1977 I got married to a man with a similar upbringing and objectives, but who came from a favela. Life in a favela is quite different, since there are a lot of social inequalities, discrimination and social exclusion, because of our skin color and financial situation. Despite all those difficulties, we've transformed the diversities into transformational tools through education. This is the only way to put down those social barriers. Today we have three children who are all graduates and also work towards the banishment of social exclusion. In 2003 we founded the Professionalizing Center Alzira de Alleluia, whose goal was to insert young adults into the working market and universities. However, due to the low level of education and lack of support from the government and sponsors, we had to change our focus to socially vulnerable children and adolescents. So far we have helped more than ten thousand people, giving them opportunities and encouragement through the activities that we've developed with the families.

Antônio's story:

I was born in Vidigal in 1951. In 1970, I was the first black man to get into a federal university. While I was a student, I started teaching math and with the money I gathered as a teacher, I was able to help my mother to build a proper house for our family, because we lived very precariously. My difficult past motivated me to found the Professionalizing Center Alzira de Alleluia, an NGO, so I could help the children in Vidigal have the same opportunities. Today I'm an engineer and professor at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF). We've been in Vidigal and the NGO for 14 years.

Before the pacification there was no respect. Safety and fear and terror were constant in our lives. The government simply did not do a thing. It was hell. Today with the pacification we have respect and the assurance

that we can live with dignity in the favela with our rights and the respect we deserve. In the social scenario, the pacification was very important, because we can host young adults, university students from all over the world who want to experience different cultures and different lives, which also enriches the favela. Our NGO is a living example of the partnership with those young adults. They come to us wishing to contribute with their expertise and work, so in exchange we offer them a place to live and experience the daily life in a favela as a true local.

The differences between Vidigal and the other communities are the amazing view to the sea and the presence of artists from all over the world, who come to Vidigal in search of beauty, safety and the warmth of the locals. Today we also have really good restaurants and hostels to serve the big demand, but we still lack the help from the government and credibility from businessmen, banks and big retail stores. The NGO needs international partners and sponsors focused on cultural exchanges, so we can spread our potential.

Layla da Cunha Horta:

My name's Layla da Cunha Horta and I was born on August 13th 1996, in Rio de Janeiro. I was raised in the north region of the city, in the neighborhoods of Campinho and Madureira. I am the daughter of a single-mother. I had a quite happy childhood, most of which I spent with my grandparents. Together with them, I also lived with my oldest brother and one of my uncles. After my grandmother's passing I went to live with my mother, my youngest brother and my stepfather.

I've always had a passion for cinema, the arts in general and I love to dance. At the age of 17 I enrolled in the Philosophy program at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ, in Portuguese). It was also then when I fell in love for the first time, which has changed my life completely. I gave birth to my son Hugo when I was 19. He's the absolute love of my life and I also dropped out of college, since I felt no identification with the course. A lot of things happened after that and they all lead me to Vidigal.

In 2016, Hugo, Diego (my then boyfriend and father of my son) and I moved to Vidigal and that's when we were introduced to the NGO SER by one of my aunts. Right away, Diego started working as an English teacher and became the manager of the NGO. In 2017, I started teaching Portuguese to adults in the community and had also gone back to college, which has allowed me to get involved with Educafro, an institution that allows people with low incomes to start their education. I was responsible for a partnership between them and SER and became the coordinator of the first study group of Educafro in the south region of Rio. Today my dream is to study Psychology at PUC-Rio and everyday I become more and more aware of my legacy as a black woman and learn more on how to position myself in the world.

I've always dreamed of visiting Vidigal. On August 14th 2016, during the World Cup, we moved in here. In the very beginning we were a bit scared, since we had never lived in a favela before. However, the good energy of the place made this feeling pass away quite quickly. Since I was not born here, I could be considered a foreigner. I've adapted quite quickly to this place. There's a small town feeling about it, since we all know each other. I like the easygoingness and so far I have not seen any armed criminals here. However, due to a recent conflict between enemy factions, the community is going through an unstable period.

Besides its gorgeous view, the greatest things about Vidigal are the nice people, its peacefulness and the semi-private beach that we have. On the other hand, the retail stores here lack in diversity and are quite expensive. The rental prices are also quite high, which don't always match the quality of the places. I believe those problems have to do with gentrification. I'm not familiar with other communities (favelas), but I believe Vidigal has an energy that there cannot be found in any other community.

I believe living in a favela completely changes one's perspective about the place and poverty. It is quite different from what is shown by the media. I believe everybody should visit a favela at least once in their lives, so they can develop more their humanistic side.

3. THE DESK RESEARCH

3.1 Introducing The Bennett scale

“Only when you see that all your beliefs, behaviors, and values are at least influenced by the particular context in which you were socialized can you fully imagine alternatives to them.” (Bennett, 2004, p.2)

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical background of my thesis. My main Sociological source is Milton J. Bennett's *The Bennett scale*, which consists six stages that, according Bennett, takes place when encountering a new cultural context. By reflecting my own experiences and the productive part of my thesis to Bennett's theories I will link this thesis not only to Visual Communication Design discourse, but also into Sociological one.

I hope this will help the reader to understand my approach, my choice of medium and the importance of first-hand experiences when comprehending a new culture or when operating in a multicultural environment. Even though the main focus of this thesis is Visual Communication and Storytelling, it is vital to understand some main concepts of Cultural studies when considering the context where the productive part of this thesis is created.

3.2 The definition of Culture

In my thesis I use Bennett's definition of culture. According to Bennett, culture can be defined as a collection of beliefs, values, behaviour patterns, it's laws and language. Bennett also focuses on the meaning of culture and how to break it down into two; *objective culture* and *subjective culture*. (Bennett, 1998)

Bennett argues, that when people are participating in something “cultural”, they mean art, literature, drama, classical music, or dance. They are taking part to one of the institutions of culture, something that has been shaped into a specific form. Bennett calls this the *objective culture*. *Subjective culture* on the other hand refers to habits, practices and psychological qualities that determines a specific group of people. It describes their thinking and manners, not the institutionalized acts that are specific to the culture they live. Bennett argues, that instead of trying compre-

hend the objective culture, understanding the subjective culture is more likely to lead to intercultural competence.” (Bennett, 1998) This division is very visible and important point when approach to something as complicated structure as a culture. Living and getting used to different habits of a new culture is to a large extent subjective culture; patois, greetings, habits, body language and so on.

3.3 From ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism

The Bennett scale was a really important tool for me to understand the situations and my reactions to them in Vidigal and in Brazil in general. Bennett argues, that when a person encounters cultural differences, or is adapting to a new culture, change in behavior and thinking is inevitable (Bennett, 2004). I am going to introduce the steps in more depth and try to clarify the stages with examples and situations I identified in my own everyday life.

Bennett presents two main concepts, *ethnocentrism* and *ethnorelativism*, which are divided into body of six stages. The first main concept, ethnocentrism, includes the first three stages *Denial*, *Defense* and *Minimization* and the latter, ethnorelativism, includes the last three, *Acceptance*, *Adaptation* and *Integration*.

Steps 1 to 3; ethnocentrism

In the first three stages under the concept of ethnocentrism one is “avoiding cultural difference, either by denying its existence, by raising defenses against it, or by minimizing its importance” (Bennett, 2004). These stages are common among people who have little or no experience of encountering individuals from different culture or have adapted stereotypical perspective of a certain culture or group.

A person who is in the first stage, Denial, is actively avoiding or eliminating the cultural differences they encounter. For instance, people with a Denial world view can be surprised by the differences between the communication and nonverbal behavior of a dominant and a non-dominant culture group, even though these groups have been living side by side in the same society. It is also common for people with the Denial

world view to have familiar but often simplifying and illusory categories of different ethnic groups. (Bennett, 2004.) Coming from US, Bennett uses in his text Latino Americans as an example of non-dominant group, but it is not difficult to find other examples. For examples immigrants or Sami people in Finland are minority groups and often discriminated and stereotyped. Discrimination is a theme that fits on every stage on the first three ethnocentric stages of the stage theory.

A person who is in the second stage, Defense, is perceiving one's own culture the most advanced and evolved. The world view of a person in this stage is often oversimplified and the world is organized to "us and them". People in this stage are likely to have discriminatory views about an another culture group. The Defensive world view in its virulent form can be expressed as open hatred to another group and in its benign form, for example, "by 'helping' non-dominant group members to succeed by bringing them into the assumedly superior dominant culture" (Bennett, 2004). For example taking an expatriate or an exchange student as a part of a circle of friends or into a hobby group that is typical to the dominant culture and 'teaching' the correct way of behaving or how one's set of values should be constructed. This type of patronizing attitude is what Williams is referring when she talks about the 'tourist gaze'. People in the defense stage might have (conscious or unconscious) underlying motifs and the discriminatory world view can be disguised to a seemingly helpful act might, for instance volunteer work or acting sympathetically towards a certain group.

The Defensive world view is in the center of nationalistic, or "nation-building" mentality ("us and them") and it is implicitly included in to attempts to export one's own cultural values. (Bennett 2004.) For instance religion, cuisine or other cultural features. An interesting variation of Defense is Reversal. In Reversal an adopted culture is perceived as superior to one's original culture. This stage is common among well-meaning exchange students and corporate expatriates who are in the beginning of the adaptation process.

Bennett writes; "Reversal may masquerade as cultural sensitivity, since it provides a positive experience of a different culture along with

seemingly analytical criticisms of one's own culture. However, the positive experience of the other culture is at an unsophisticated stereotypical level, and the criticism of one's own culture is usually an internalization of others' negative stereotypes." (Bennett, 2004) It is common to observe defensive or reversal behavior in mundane situations. Seemingly innocent, dismissive jokes among friends or generally negative attitude towards certain (cultural) group can work as a connective, but arguable habit among peers. This kind of behavior can, however, reveal the true defensive mindset of the acting persons. Secondly, an uncritical or glorifying attitude towards another culture or an individual from another culture meets the characteristics of Reversal. In both cases the deeper understanding of one's own and the other culture is in shallow level and the world view is still strongly ethnocentric.

Reversal is often visible when people travel abroad for first time and encounter something new and exciting. This type of "Honeymoon" is common and I often find myself glorifying something new and exotic. I think this is very common and very human. However, if reversal thinking is a constant state, there is a often an escapist motif in the background. Long time traveller who return their own cultures might stay on this romanticize stage and declare how much better the place x is compared to one's home. This, of course does not mean that could not be true in any case, but person with a ethocentric worldview, this kind of insights are often romanticize and superficial.

The third stage, Minimization, is when one's culture or certain cultural features are incorrectly perceived as universal. The observed cultural differences are categorized similar to one's own culture. To clarify, the knowledge of people's biological similarity are used to subdue cultural differences and then generalized to concern other qualities, like personality, motivations, social behavior or learning style. This assumed cross-cultural equivalency is especially problematic when it is applied to religious or political concepts of another culture. It is included in the stage of Minimization that there are "universal absolutes". (Bennett 2004) This is causing people in Minimization to become blind to their own culture and expecting similarities when encountering another. The problem here is

that if people fail to comprehend cultures as contexts, they fail to understand alternatives to one's own beliefs, values and social norms. People in this stage can never truly understand, that practices and values that are seemingly self-evident, are actually an embodiment of one's culture surrounding. (Bennett, 2004)

Steps 4 to 6; ethnorelativism

The second concept is ethnorelativism, which includes stages Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration. People with the ethnocentric world view are able to understand one's own culture as a context and as a one of many possible ones with its own belief systems, practices and world views. This is crucial point, and as Bennett clarifies; "Only when you see that all your beliefs, behaviors, and values are at least influenced by the particular context in which you were socialized can you fully imagine alternatives to them." (Bennett, 2004). After perceiving cultures as contexts, it is possible to not only distinct the differences, but also understand them in correct contextual frame. With ethnocentric worldview one is able to understand other cultures and practises in them and, more importantly, recognize people in them as different from oneself, but as equal. (Bennett, 2004).

The fourth stage in Bennett scale is Acceptance. People at this stage are proficient at recognizing how the different cultures work and how people operate within the varying cultural concepts. They are able to understand cultural differences in general level and contrasting them, but they are not necessarily experts in many cultures per se. Having knowledge about a culture and its practises is not alone sufficient for someone to be at Acceptance stage. Only through comprehensive understanding gained by the experience of interacting within the specific cultural context one can truly achieve an ethnocentric mindset. Bennett argues, that people need "a critical mass of information" to be able to use any linguistic or behavioral skills in culturally appropriate ways. (Bennett, 2004)

It is crucial to understand that Acceptance doesn't automatically mean agreement. The fact that one is having Ethnocentric world view doesn't mean that the person is automatically sharing or endorsing the values and habits of other cultures. In fact, the simplistic and uncritical

endorsement of another culture is linked to Reversal stage of the ethnocentric world view. Some features of a culture can be judged, but it can be done in ethnocentric manner if it is done in a non-trivializing way. One of the main issues with Acceptance stage is to comprehend how to uphold ethical values while accepting the relative nature of value systems. (Bennett, 2004)

After the "critical mass of information" (Bennett, 2004) and meaningful, culture-related interactions, one can experience and act truly culturally and move to the next stage of ethnocentric concept. This stage is called Adaptation. People at this stage are able shift the cultural frame and perception from one to another. Because moving to Adaptation stage is not only intellectual, it is crucial to have a collection of lived experiences and interactions in order to understand the cultural specific experiences, and have the vocabulary to express this cultural specific experiences. (Bennett, 2004)

The last stage is Integration. According to Bennett, in this stage the cultural differences is expanded to one's identity and switching from one cultural context to another comes naturally. The Integration means a fundamental shift in one's definition of cultural identity. For example people working in a large international company, that requires working between two or more countries. After years of working, living and learning the language, one can be adapted in multiple cultures and in the end reach the Integration stage.

I chose Bennett's stage theory, because of the resonance I felt with it when I first read in Rio. The impacts of first-hand experience can be very strong and can not be understated. Observing one's surrounding and the subjective culture is an effective method and starting point for different kinds of researches. Because I consider myself a sensitive person with strong emotions and inner life, autoethnography suits me well.

People are drawn to storytelling and by nature trying to understand complicated things by creating sometimes false associations (e.g. conspiracy theories), the danger of oversimplification and what Bennett calls Minimization, is strongly present in autoethnographic research. It is important to understand that the way we perceive and interpret situations, is strongly cultural.

4. CROSS-CULTURAL STORYTELLING

4.2 Storytelling and thematic photo essay

The production part of my thesis is a thematic photography essay, which focuses on a central theme and presents photos relevant to the chosen theme. Thematic essays do not normally follow a chronological sequence and images are presented in an order which convey the wanted message most powerfully. (collectivelens.com, 2018)

In his book *Essentials of Visual Communication* Bo Bergström introduces basic concepts of storytelling. According to Bergström, dramaturges, the professionals of creating a captivating story, define a story as a narrative of joined events, which connects people, their actions and their struggles. Certain events in a story creates expectation of how the plot will develop, and every story has its recognizable clues. After a dramatic opening the audience expects a drama, and after a humorous beginning, a comedy; there is a preconception of the story's message. The setup also predicts change, on two levels in fact: in the actual story and in the audience's consciousness. The characters in the story face conflict and choices that will change them. (Bergström, 2008)

According to Bergström, all stories function on parallel levels. These levels are the action level (the formal system), which describes what happens, and the narrative level (the stylistic system), which describes how it happens. The storyteller operates on both of these two levels by using several storytelling components. (Bergström, 2008)

In my thesis project the action level is a travel story. It describes what the protagonist sees and experiences when he is living in another culture. The narrative level, the "how" the story is told, from subjective, first-person point of view, and the story is told with the non-linear fashion. In this case the autoethnography is both the method using lived experiences and the outcome, the artistic production using autoethnography as an inspiration and the base for the storytelling.

4.3 The dramatic and non-dramatic storytelling

The dramatic storytelling technique is probably the most known technique and it dates back Aristotle and his Poetics. It follows the dramatic

structure, a story arch, with clear beginning, middle and end. This technique is closed, with not much room for interpretation, and it is often based on recognizable twists, elements and characters. Conflict or a disturbance of status quo is the motor for the story and it's twists in this technique. (Bergström, 2008)

The non-dramatic storytelling on the other hand is an open storytelling technique, with more room for interpretation, and it is based on significant participation and interaction from the audience, who almost have to knit together the story themselves. Personal reflections and values become important building blocks for the story,

According to Bergström, since the early 1970s, people in the film and theatre world have been looking for an alternative to the classic dramatic system. They spurned the long waiting lists for drama courses, searching instead for a storytelling system that doesn't necessary have to capture and conquer the audience. What they wanted was to motivate the audience to listen. The outcome of this research is non-dramatic storytelling, which builds an open structure in films, news reports and advertising. This is created from different perspectives, so the audience is required to make its own assessments and complete the picture itself. Proponents of this approach reject linear storytelling in favour of new, different story arcs that meander and spiral around, often with contradictions and exciting digressions. (Bergström, 2008)

4.4 Storytelling in autoethnographic research

In his autoethnographic research "*Obstacles, Transitions, & Perspectives: An In-Depth Look at the Spectacle of Deviant Bodies*" Taylor C. Manning is using his personal experiences to "humanize the deviant behaviors and bodies of eating disordered and physically disabled persons in Western culture." (Manning, 2015). Manning is describing openly about his experiences and how his identity shifted when he went through the difficult periods of his life. For instance, in his emotional and vivid storytelling Manning uses "Meeting Ana" and "Falling for Mia" as subtitles for his chapter. After a while the what seems to be a story about meeting a new person, instead Manning is introducing the beginning of his struggle with Anorexia and Bulimia.

Manning describes the events that led him to the situation and how the eating disorders manifested to him as a person (“diet coach Ana) who he was having conversations with. Manning writes; “My diet coach Ana became my love; she would always help me stay motivated and striving for visible, calculable, change. I had no idea that we were developing a relationship initially, but her words kept me inspired:

Remember how much your family loves you—especially your mom and dad.

They love you so much—so much that they can't see what you've become.

If they knew how you were being treated at school it would break their hearts—you must never tell them!

Please don't let them feel pity for you—Don't make them feel this way.

I love you—I feel your pain—I have suffered with you—I don't want to suffer anymore either.

Let's show the assholes out there how strong we are together

I will help you.”

(Manning, 2015, p. 28)

Manning opens the chapter *Transitioning to a New Spectacle* where he is describing the motorcycle accident in which he lost his leg as following; “Throughout my adult life, my most beloved possession was the Yamaha R6 sport-bike that I purchased when I was 19 years old. I dreamed of having that machine for as long as I can remember, and when I finally purchased it, the feeling was beyond any level of satisfaction that words could describe.” (Manning, 2015, p. 49). Manning is opening the scene very casually and in light fashion; he creates expectations that by the end of the chapter are not met; he is playing with reader's preconceptions in order to make the storytelling more dramatic and surprising.

One of the strengths of Manning's work is his ability to vary the styles of writing from personal, diary-like to more objective and formal style. Later in his research he explains why; “I subconsciously developed an objective, medicalized storytelling voice that allows me to speak scientifically about the happenings of that day; I was unaware of this process until I investigated it for the purposes of this autoethnography. The objective, medicalized language I use to re-tell my story to general others allows me to avoid welling up with the emotions at the devastating events as told in the previous narrative.” (Manning, 2015, p. 54.) The combination of Manning's writing style is very effective. By using autoethnography, Manning brings the subject closer to the reader and evokes empathy for not only him, but also people struggling with similar issues. By linking his experiences into an academical and scientific contexts, he successfully uses autoethnography to humanize the subject matter.

In the production part of my thesis I am exploring the possibilities of photography to use as autoethnographic tool. Images contain ability to show and then and evoke emotions. For instance, could Manning tell his story in a form of a photo essay? Can an autoethnographic research be done using only non-verbal mediums? It is important to comprehend that autoethnography can be used not only as a research method, but also a production, as a movie, writing or, in my case, a photo essay.

5. THE VIDIGAL PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

5.1 About the photography project

Choosing the approach was not an easy task. I wanted to avoid the common pitfalls that are often present when depicting favelas or placing a narrative in them. I started my project as any other photography project; by exploring my surrounding and making shooting plans. I was planning different types of photos; portraits, landscapes, events etcetera. During the planning, because I was not very familiar with the subject yet, I became worried about the possible unintentional underlying message of my project. How I, as an outsider of the favela, am able to depict the essence of the place without being biased? Am I showing only the surface in superficial way and tell the story of Vidigal from through my own biased viewpoint?

In the beginning of the project, before I started to approach people for my project, I made a business card to introduce myself and a short questionnaire for the people to fill in after the portrait was taken. People were mainly positive and willing to be in the picture. Nevertheless, the questionnaire did not work as I planned. I found out that using the questionnaire on the spot was more challenging than I was expecting, because when approaching people on the street, people usually were busy or hesitated to spend time on giving information and share experiences to a stranger. I figured that better way to approach people was to do it in bars, cafés, stores and other places when they are not in between places or in a hurry. With this approach I managed to get about twenty portraits, with about half of them that I was pleased with. After few months I started the project, I concluded to three different viewpoints to my subject;

1. Sociology (cultural studies)
2. Storytelling
3. Photography project

These aspects are overlapping in my work, but the first two, sociology and storytelling, are the building blocks for the artistic part and ways to reflect my way of work, which is often intuitive, but is built on theoretic-

cal studies and years of work. My working method is by its nature subjective and the photography project, instead of being a documentary about the Vidigal, evolved to a reflective project inspired by the experiences from clashing with new cultures.

The reason why I discarded the documentary photography and chose the autoethnography method and concentrated on the nonlinear narrative was that the subject of my thesis felt too wide and abstract to implement to a specific location. I decided to shift from the documentary to more personal approach, because I wanted to emphasize personal experiences, memories and the emotional impact because, in the end, I needed time and a new surrounding to contemplate and a fresh start, so to speak. I believe that because of this situation in life, I was more open and felt new experiences stronger than normally. I needed to make the project personal and a channel go through the things I was trying to solve in my past, but also a way to communicate the new experiences. Living in a favela was the powerful experience I needed.

I believe that no matter what are the motifs of the photographer, the end result is always influenced by the photographer's background. Like classic dramatic storytelling with its drama arc, photography documentaries follow certain rules and practises. There are common norms about framing, composing and creating a logical and interesting story. Nevertheless a modern viewer is skillful to recognize the manipulated photos, but storytelling is still partly culture-bound and learned, that it might be difficult to notice. Bennett argues, that we are at least partly a product of our own cultural background. (Bennett, 2004.)

What really intrigues me in photography and storytelling in general, is that the basic principles can be put to use again and again, in totally different surroundings and contexts. What is important to remember, is that these principles are agreements and practices, not universal truths or absolutes. The distinction between dramatic and non-dramatic storytelling (and other storytelling techniques) are not widely known or understood; for many, the classic drama arch is the one and only "right" way to create a storyline.

When conducting my photo shoots, I was inspired by my long time influencer in photography German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans. His body of work consist wide variety of themes and styles. He is an example of a photographer who's style becomes coherent from it's seemingly random and varying style. Cameras, format, colors and subject matters vary wildly from Berlin's underground scene to a banal everyday life still-lives. The interesting note is that most of the photos are so called "snapshot aesthetic", which origin to the 1960's and is rebelling against the what is considered the traditional canon of composition. Tillmans' style used in photo essays varies from poetic to disturbing, but they convey a strong emotion and feeling of sensitivity. The power of his work is the variety of subject matters and candid use of styles, but also the strong sense of storytelling, which leaves the interpretation for the viewer. He trusts the intelligence of his audience and the ability to create the interpretations and stories without highlighting it or creating forced storyline. This, for me, is one of the strengths of photography and one of the reasons why I chose it as a medium for my project.

One of the most important feature and the power of images are the seemingly self-evident and even banal ability to document current time. Time freezes in a picture, and over time, what seemed irrelevant when the photo was taken, becomes the essence of the image. Think about your fifth grade photo or a holiday snapshot from five years ago. When you look at those photos, you might suddenly notice that ridiculous hairdo you had already forgotten, that house with a peculiar detail, that scarf (or a person) you loved but lost. You noticed the passing of time. My memory doesn't work this way. In my head I, and the closest people around me are the same as five years ago. We look the same and we behave the same. But this isn't necessarily true, and a photo can prove it. Memories change over time and mind is filling the gaps, changing details and linking places, people, emotions together. For me, already a bit after a year, I start to forget certain details and places.

Now when look at the photos of my project, I see different things there than a year ago. They are bittersweet or funny or irrelevant, but there they are, documented as they were in the Spring of 2017. With the autoethnography and nonlinear storytelling and by juxtaposing portraits, places and

details I am trying to illustrate how I understand the nature of memories and how things are associated in a way that is hard to comprehend. After trying different ways to construct the photo essay, I decided to create a sub-narrative by creating a link between the images across the book. I created circular shaped cutouts from photos that are found in the book and juxtaposed them next to a new image. My goal is to give insight, that there is more to the layout that one can see at first glimpse. This sub story is not explained or underlined; it is a subtle way of creating a new layer to the narrative.

The challenging part of the photography project was to select the photos. I tried several combination with different emphasis. One approach was to tell my story through portraits. I made tryouts with cutting out the background and adding a color behind the people in order to bring the people to the center. With every limitation I added to the selection, for instance solely concentrate on portraits, the core of the story seemed to move further from my intentions. Finally I decided to follow my intuition and choose the photos I felt emotionally strongest. For me, some of the photos are even more personal and reflecting than a written story. When seeing a person or a place, it can evoke strong emotions. As a photographer, trying the limits of autoethnographic research with photographs was a rewarding and interesting try.

Finally, after I made my photo selection, I started to join the reflective visual narrative together with two different medias; a book and an exhibition. Because of the subject matter I wanted the final to be reachable and easy to access for the audience. For the budget I had, I chose to create lower-cost implementation in order to be able to execute multiple artistic solutions. I was thinking of the phrase "The medium is the message" by Marshall McLuhan and I created a contrast between the material and the place; (framed) poster-like images seems a bit out of place in a gallery, creating an extra layer for the play of changing contexts.

I held the exhibition in galleria Kalleria in Helsinki in June 2018. The exhibition consists of 10 pieces, size 50x70 cm framed photographs and a book, which was sold in the exhibition space. The book has 64 pages and 30 photographs.

5.2 The photobook

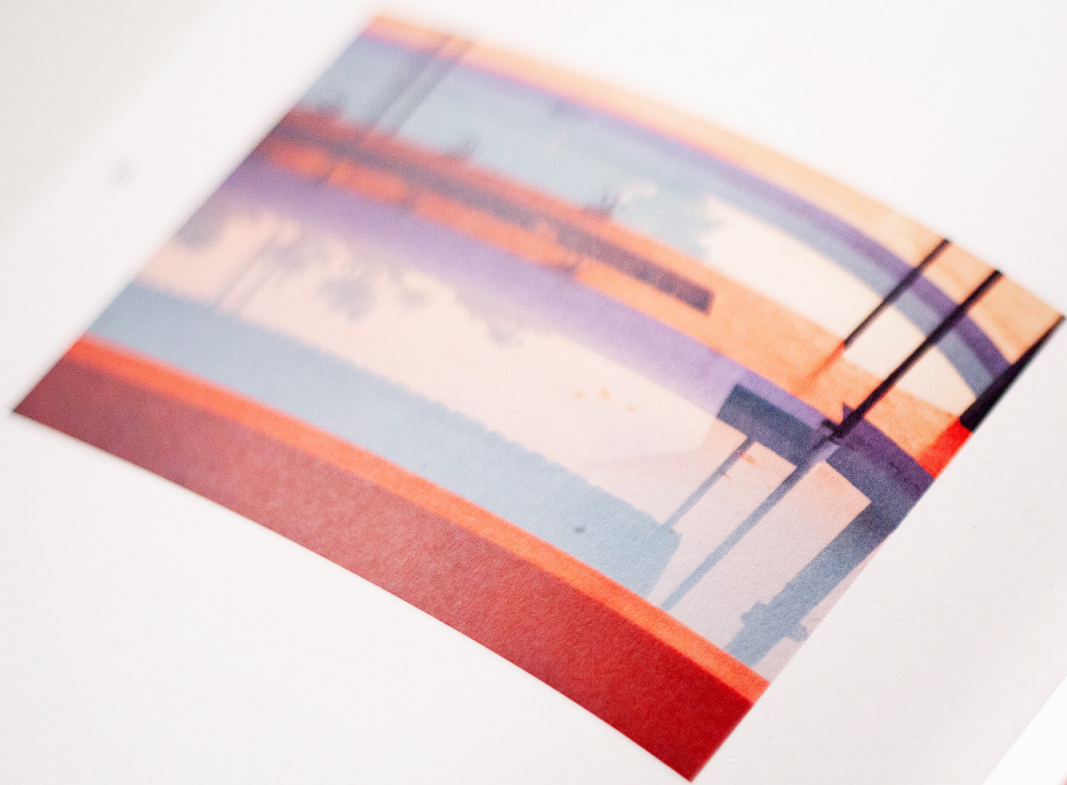
I first started working with the book layout. After selecting the photographs to be used I organized them in categories; portraits, places, details and so on. After this I created a time line and placed the images on it for creating the basic storyline. After choosing the photos that I wanted to include my narrative, I created different sets of images to see how well they communicate my story. Because book is traditionally meant to be read in a linear order (it is usually read from the beginning to the end) it has its limitations for non-linear storytelling. Nevertheless, a thematic photo essay is not expected to be linear, it is more free format and it emphasizes the powerful quality that images possess – the ability to evoke strong emotions.

My solution for the book (and the exhibition) production was to use an on-demand digital printing house. The fast and affordable production allowed re-prints when needed. The first book layout didn't go as planned. I made a mistake in the design and all of the spreads were off by one page. Good thing (and a learning experience) was that because of that mistake, I realized that many of the layouts became actually more interesting than the original layout I did. This gave me an idea for the final execution of the work; changing the story by reorganizing the individual photos freely and in random order. This solution is simple to implement in printed and digital version.

The selection of photos I chose for the exhibition is more concise than the one in book. Because I wanted to try the effect of different display, the photos in the exhibition are planned to be read more linear than the ones in the book. In the exhibition the non-linear storytelling is present with the “memory” images. They link some of the photos and also creates a link to the book. The opening photo of the exhibition, Notes / As noites, is an a wordplay in Portuguese and English. *As noites* translates to *The nights* in English, which gives another meaning to the opening. Playing with meanings is my way of multiple layers to the storytelling and possibility for insight to the viewers.

I was lucky enough to have my photo included in a project called *Photobooks from Finland*. It is a website archive founded in 2014 which introduces Finnish photographer to the bigger audience.







5.3 The exhibition

The Vidigal exhibition was open in Galleria Kalleria in Helsinki from 2.6.2018 to 10.6.2018. The prints in the exhibition also follows the idea that the project should be accessible. The prints were printed on a regular posters paper instead of high end, finished fine art paper. In addition to the idea of accessible and affordable prints, I think that the choice of material matches the idea of the shift between contexts. I believe that the choice of materials supports the idea I want to communicate; to have something beautiful it doesn't have to be high-end, exclusive or expensive.

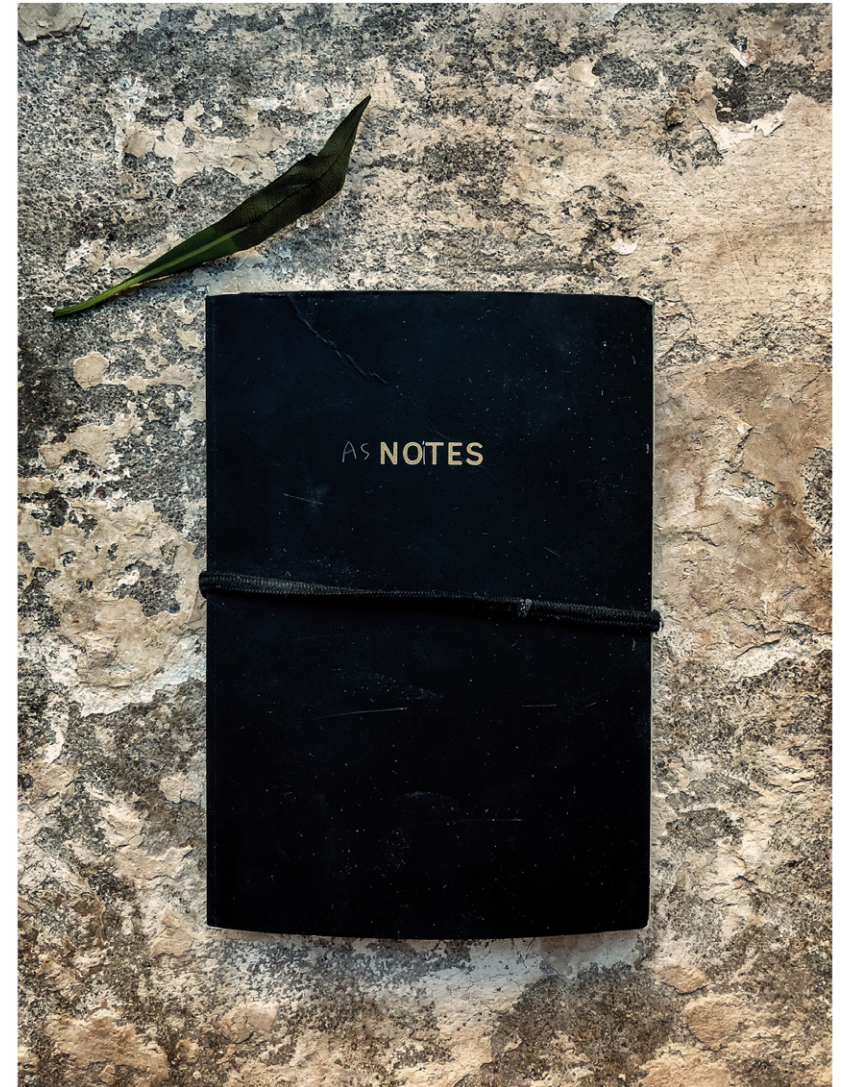
The exhibition display was designed so that the viewer can start explore the photos from any point of the room. The photos were numbered and named, which guided the viewers, but it was not essential. I conducted the story from a subjective point of view. The final form and display got chosen on the location. I tried to leave visual hints and multiple possible ways for the viewers to catch up a storyline; the sequence, pairing and using parts of the photos in a circular form.

I will re-create the exhibition to Aalto University's Väre gallery in October 2018. I am using mainly the same images, but I will bring some new images which I felt that was missing from this exhibition.

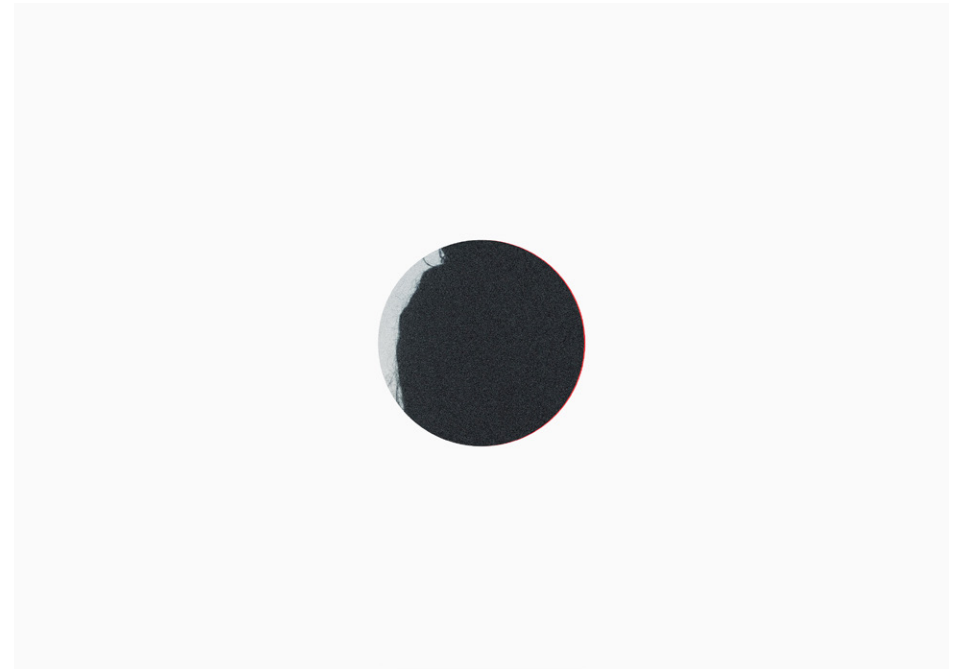




1.
Notes / As Noites
2017



2.
Memory nr.1
2017



3·
Fabi
2017



4.
Memory nr.2
2017



5.
Niterói
2017



6.
Untitled 1
2017



7.
Memory nr.3
2017



8.
Layla
2017



9.
Untitled 2
2017



10.
Untitled 10
2017



6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Conclusion and personal reflection

With this thesis my goal was to understand the complexity of cultural contexts, find a method that I could use to convey my experiences into a visual form one cultural context (Brazil) to another (Finland). The cruces I tried to overcome was finding a suitable approach, explaining the background of the work, visualize my experiences and communicate them for different audiences. In the desk research, the study explored parts of cultural studies, storytelling methods and autoethnography.

My biggest insight considered the autoethnographic research method. I was very impressed by the human-centered basis of the method and notion that, much like a culture we come from, our actions are influenced by our personal history, upbringing, race, sex, class etc. and the surrounding we grew up. This essential notion is absent from a more traditional research methods, and the researcher often presented as a neutral entity. Understanding, that one can not avoid the influence of the surrounding culture and, that the values and practices that are often taken as universal truths, are actually just one of the many possible contexts, will help not only become more fluent communicator cross cultures, but also to understand oneself.

I am aware that combining a complex sociological issues to a photo essay is basically a mission impossible. It would have helped my work process and time management and clarify the thesis if I had narrowed down the subjects I research. I got lost in the research at times, because I find so many new interesting associations.

Nevertheless I believe that there is an important point there; in what ever context and ways we are communication with members of other culture, we must acknowledge that there are fundamental differences in seeing the world. This notion is true in many levels of cultural communication.

The main research question thesis was; *What are the cruces of photographic storytelling in cross-cultural visual communication?* I was able to point out the ones I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, and more. I believe that I managed to find a solutions for few of them with the

medium, research method and the storytelling I chose. Over the course 12 months that it took me to finish this thesis, I shifted my emphasis from the theoretical research to the production. For the last months I worked mainly with the photo essay and it's variation for the exhibition.

In the beginning of my thesis I tried to combine and reflect my experiences in a new cultural context to a sociological approach. I wanted to understand the depth and intensity of the cultural encounter had on me. I used sociological approach to conceptualize my emotions, thoughts and reactions. I research about cultural contexts, the history and the current situation of favelas, went through different research methods and finally chose my approach to be autoethnography.

After every new approach, theory or a concept there suddenly were five or ten more to explore. While writing about the subjects, new associations started to appear and previous ideas to fade. All of the subjects I included in my works could easily be their own researches. I came very aware of the complexity of the subjects I research, and I did my best to combine them to the production part. The textual and visual division of labor worked well for me, and they supported each other in the end and also during the process.

I noticed that previous knowledge and motifs, skills and the reason of the choices made, are often, in a way, latent in the background. When working with photography, for example, the process of choosing the images is often intuitive and difficult to communicate with words. Same goes with experiences and memories. I think that finding this connection was in the core of my work.

To continue this work, I will deepen my desk research. In the future I am able divide the research and the production more clearly, and clarify the scope of the subject matters. For development, I will refine the use of the "memory" photos, which I think can work well as a technique to link images and stories together.

My project continues in October 2018, when I have the exhibition in Aalto University's Väre gallery. My goal is to organize the exhibition at the NGO Ser in Vidigal in March 2019.

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